

## **GOOD FRIDAY MEDITATION ON STATIONS OF THE CROSS**

### **April 2, 2021**

A famous painting of the crucifixion by Sigismund Goetze in 1904 entitled *Despised and Rejected* has at its center, a crucified Jesus with an angel hovering above, holding the Gethsemane cup. Around him is a panorama of humanity. Yet, none of these people look at the cross. The scientist stares at his test tube and the sports addict his sports page. The society woman plays with her flowers coyly, aware of the admiring gaze of a fashionable young man. The politician has his crowd, the ditch digger his beer, the artist his paints. At the foot of the cross a woman with a baby sits dejected; in her despair, even she does not look up. In the distance a widow with her lonely burden of grief stares only at the ground. The world, engrossed in its own pursuits - its business, pleasures, gain, games and grief - has no time for and no thought of Christ - who is still despised and rejected by everyone.

How true is that reality for all of us? How does the crucifixion affect us? Is this something that happened so long ago that it does not impact us? I believe the Passion reveals a deep truth about the way the world is. Not the world that God created and pronounced good... but the world that we have created. The world we have made out of fear. Out of shame. Out of bitterness. Out of our desperate need to hide our own tender wounds. In our desperation and fear, we try to make it someone else's fault; we cast blame and cry out for the blood of someone else, an innocent, over and over and over. The Passion reveals the worst in us. Reveals the truth of the hideous things we're capable of when we're afraid. When we're ashamed.

Of course it also reveals an even deeper truth about who God is and how God responds to our shame and fear. The truth that Jesus shows with his life and ministry is a profound challenge to the world we have made. The truth that Jesus shows us is that no matter how benign and beneficial we might think our human systems and structures are; they are not always what they appear to be. Our world is infected with injustice. Jesus demonstrated with his life, with his teachings, and with his death the truth about this infectious injustice, and the human cost that is always required for maintaining unjust structures of power. All through his life and his death he shows us God's loud "NO" to the dominant systems of this world, and God's louder "YES" to the way of hope, peace, and justice.

These are truths that we can see with the help of the cross, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. Once Jesus is nailed to the cross the crowd, no longer interested in the spectacle, turns away and goes back to business as usual.

All four of the Gospel accounts of these events have significant, subtle differences. But in John's version there are no earthquakes, no darkness covering the earth, no temple curtains being torn in two. In John, Jesus simply dies on a cross, and is put in a tomb. The empire doesn't strike back so much as it just continues. People return to their lives of luxury or labor. The status quo remains the status quo – unabated and unchallenged.

How often do we catch a glimpse of this life-giving, world-altering truth and then go back to business as usual? How tempting is it for us to turn away from racial injustices, attacks and gun violence and not look at or accept this truth? The truth that we are capable of this horror... that the Passion takes place because of the world we have made, the world we are content to live in every day. We are constantly at risk of turning away –

turning away from the cross of Christ, and turning away from all the crucified people of every generation – and returning to the status quo. It's so very easy to close our eyes, to change the channel, turn the page, walk away telling ourselves that the reality, the truth, of the cross doesn't really have anything to do with us.

What is truth? The cross reveals the truth. The truth of the pain and suffering that continues to exist in the world because of the inhumane demands of our unjust systems and structures. But also the truth that for those who are willing to join themselves to a community that continues to look on the cross and strives to stand in solidarity with those who are hurting, who are marginalized, who are still being sacrificed – crucified – every day, the cross also opens up the way of transformation and salvation.

For today God shows us a love that can forgive and heal all that you and I and our lost human race have done to each other and to our world. This love is ready to absorb the worst of our lives and what we do to each other, to smother all of it in its unimaginable depths, to free us and to draw us into real lives.

There's an ancient Christian prayer called the "Anima Christi" that has been used for the last seven hundred years that invites us to take everything we have to Jesus hanging on the cross. It goes like this:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me,  
Body of Christ, save me,  
Blood of Christ [overwhelm] me,  
Water from the side of Christ wash me clean,  
Passion of Christ comfort me,  
Within thy wounds hide me,  
Suffer me not to be separated from you.  
Only that kind of love can save us.

This is the time to open ourselves to this love hung on a cross for you, for me, for the whole world. May we be given the strength to never turn away from the cross, and to live more fully into the truth, the way and the life as revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.